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DN EXTRA

May 2007

Weir power

David's thrilling marathon win

Some like it hot

Bringing sex and disability to the web

DN EXTRA...

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Remploy staff fed up with waiting for answers

BY DN REPORTER

Remploy employees are petitioning the government for an answer on the future of the company, after months of uncertainty.

The petition* was set up by Remploy worker Michael Rogers, from Penzance in Cornwall, and has been signed by more than 100 people so far.

He said: "People down here are fed up, we don't hear anything. The company blame the government and the government blame the company."

Last July, disabled people's minister Anne McGuire asked Remploy, the UK's largest employer of disabled people, to draw up a restructuring plan for its own future, to be implemented within five years.

A Remploy spokeswoman said its proposals were still in consultation stages and there was no fixed deadline to present the plan to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

She said: "It is a period of uncertainty and anxiety for staff, but there is an absolute guarantee that no disabled people will be compulsorily made redundant."

A DWP spokesman said: "I shouldn't imagine we're too far away now. Time is of the essence, but we're waiting for Remploy to submit their plans."

**To view the petition, visit http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/penzance*

On the cover: Wheelchair athletes David Weir (*pictured*) and Shelly Woods completed a British double at this year's Flora London Marathon.

Defending champion Weir won the men's race in a time of 1:30:49, beating close rival Kurt Fearnley by one second in a thrilling sprint finish.

The two racers, who had been practically level throughout the entire race, found time to shake hands at Big Ben before pushing on for the final mile.

In the women's event, Shelly Woods finished ahead of Italian Francesca Porcellato to claim her first London Marathon title.

Woods, who finished second to Porcellato in the previous two events, finished just outside her personal best, clocking up a time of 1:50:40.

Pictured above, TV presenter and former Paralympic basketball star Ade Adepitan, who made his marathon debut in the race, being congratulated by Cherie Booth QC.

For a full report on the marathon, see the June issue of *DN*.

Pictures by Jamie Trounce

Edmonds is latest star to abuse disabled bay

DN CAMPAIGN BAYWATCH

TV presenter Noel Edmonds was spotted using a disabled parking bay at a gym in Bristol, even though there were 400 other empty spaces.

He was seen using the space while attending a charity event for people with prostate cancer at the David Lloyd fitness centre at the end of last month.

Mr Edmonds' manager said he had used the space for "security reasons".

He said: "He was told to park there by the manager, because they wanted to get him in and out as quickly as possible."

A spokeswoman for the fitness centre did not apologise but said: "He was authorised by the club to temporarily park in one of its disabled parking bays in order to unload some heavy boxes, as it did not compromise any other disabled members at the time."

Information confusion

BY **IVY BROADHEAD**

Disabled and older people and their carers are struggling to access information on the health and social care services available to them, according to a new report*.

In some cases, participants were given false or outdated information, directed to inaccessible websites, or repeatedly passed between organisations.

Although there was rarely a lack of information available, it was difficult to access, the research by the Picker Institute found.

Chief executive of the Picker Institute, Angela Coulter, said: "Patients, service users and carers are left standing at a crossroads in their lives with no signposts to information about the kinds of support they say are vital."

The report calls for a central contact point to provide information on local health, social care and voluntary sector services in every area.

Health minister Rosie Winterton said: "We absolutely agree that information should be proactively given to people who use the NHS.

"We are piloting information prescriptions, which will give people a tailor-made 'prescription' of reliable sources of information about their condition – and the new NHS Choices website, a one-stop gateway to navigate NHS services."

But a Department of Health spokeswoman said they could not comment about the social care aspects of the report.

**Accessing information about health and social care services; for a copy, tel: 01865 208100 or visit www.pickereurope.org*

Green giant: Amputee Derek Shaw has been named volunteer of the year by the environmental volunteering organization BTCV in its national Green Heroes awards. He is pictured with other BTCV volunteers at a Sheffield scheme to get people more involved in gardening and conservation as a way of keeping fit.

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Mencap pledges to work with families

BY DN REPORTER

Learning difficulties charity Mencap has launched a new charter* describing how it will work with the relatives of people who use its services.

The charter says Mencap will respect the wishes of service-users, but will aim to share information and involve their family members in planning and provision of support.

It will also encourage individuals to maintain contact with their families, should they wish to.

Pictured at last month's launch at the House of Commons are David Walker and Anne Ferguson, who both contributed to the charter, with David's mother Gloria (*left*).

Dame Jo Williams, chief executive of Mencap, said: "Mencap was created as a family-based organisation. We've now moved to an organisation still committed to families, but we are also now an organisation for people with a learning disability.

"We needed to make a statement about how important families still are, but in the modern day context. It's part of Mencap moving on and moving forward."

Care services minister Ivan Lewis said: "This charter makes a very powerful statement about the responsibility of organisations, governmental or not, to work in partnership with families."

**www.mencap.org.uk*

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'Early intervention can help'

BY **IVY BROADHEAD**

Intensive early intervention can raise the language, daily living skills and IQ levels of children with autism, a new report* has found.

The children participating in the study received intensive tutoring in a wide range of skills, known as Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention (EIBI), over two years.

IQ increased "very substantially" for a quarter of participants, and two thirds of participants benefited from some increase, the research conducted by the University of Southampton found.

Professor Bob Remington, deputy head of the school of psychology at the university, said: "The positive changes we see in IQ, language and daily living skills [as a result of EIBI] can make a real difference to the future lives of children with autism."

A spokeswoman from the National Autistic Society welcomed the research, but said: "Quality evaluation of any therapy requires more than one study."

The results came as the charity Research Autism launched an online information centre on autism interventions, which include behavioural therapies, structured education and communication techniques.

**www.researchautism.net*

History man: Visually impaired visitors to Doddington Hall near Lincoln can experience the sounds, textures and smells of Elizabethan England through a new free sensory tour. Blind volunteer Mike Ellis, pictured at Doddington Hall, helped staff create the tour of the house and gardens, which will run until the end of September.

Shopping centre's accessible toilet farce

Disabled people who want to use the accessible toilet on the first floor of a Fife shopping centre are forced to use an escalator – or make a half-mile detour.

And when they want to return to the ground floor, they either have to use a flight of stairs or leave the building again to make the same detour in reverse.

Christine Munro, from Midlothian, who has arthritis, was able to reach the toilet at the Kingsgate Shopping Centre in Dunfermline via the escalator.

But to return to the ground floor she was forced to use the stairs.

Mrs Munro, who visited the shopping centre in April, said: "If I'd been there on my own, I wouldn't have been able to access it.

"Two people who'd seen it happen regularly [disabled people forced to make a difficult detour to reach the toilet] said it was a disgrace."

A shopping centre spokesman said an extension, which would include a lift for disabled visitors, was due to open by August 2008.

DN HACKED OFF

CATHY REAY

Why I feel safer in the city than when I'm far from home

I hope my teacher doesn't read this column, because I'm about to spill the beans on how I manage to get all my articles in on time. I use ones I've written for magazines, of course. Not only does it look impressive that I managed to find cool people to interview, it's also far less work. I just submitted a piece about a rock band called The Academy Is that I wrote over a year ago, and got a B for it. Not bad.

You're probably thinking "what a cheeky mare!", but it's more difficult for me to get interviews with the stars than you might think. This isn't because they don't have the time, or that they're never in London (one of the many perks of working in this city is that bands ALWAYS tour here). I actually turn down a lot of interviews nowadays because when musicians aren't in London, it's often too impractical for me to travel to them.

'It's more difficult for me to get interviews with the stars than you might think'

Allow me to explain. Recently I was asked to interview a certain big name rock group, but the only way I could get any decent length of time with them would mean travelling to Bournemouth. This would normally be fine, but the only time slot I could get with the band was the evening, which meant getting the last train back to London late at night. Since I had never been to Bournemouth, I was nervous. I worried that it would be unsafe, that I wouldn't know the way back to the train station, that I would get lost, that there would be suspicious characters hanging around. I couldn't afford a taxi myself. Living in London, you learn to take all those things in your stride, but when it's somewhere new and so far from home, it's scary. Thankfully a friend joined me on my trip, something I was very grateful for, especially as he had to buy his own train ticket.

I was recently offered another interview in Oxford. Again, not that far away but again, it meant I would have to take the last train home. I don't know if I feel more vulnerable because of my defencelessness due to being small (though I love having that as an excuse sometimes – "mum, can you pick me up? I feel a bit unsafe here") or if everyone in my position feels the same. If ever I move out of the capital I'm well and truly buggered, I know that much.

Cathy Reay writes in *DN Extra* every month as part of our Hacked Off campaign to get more disabled people into journalism and stamp out their misrepresentation in the media.

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Spicing up the web

Penny Pepper's new website will celebrate disability sexuality. Now she needs your help

How many of us have tried a web search on the terms "disability sex", or variations of? Doing my own UK restricted search, good ol' *DN* came up tops, followed by a list of variable titbits which sounded increasingly earnest the further down I read. Many sites were evidently full of useful information but, alas, sounded oh so dry and about as removed from sexy play and passion as one could imagine.

When it comes to a quality website celebrating disability sexuality in all its messy and contradictory glory, we have very minimal presence.

I will admit it is a gargantuan task to challenge this. Immediately you are up against thousands of years of civilisation presenting the body as having a set normality, and there are the more contemporary pressures from the media that snipe at the slight deviation from this perceived idea.

Some of you may have read my book *Desires* and one of my key interests as a writer is to challenge any lazy concept of a "normal" status quo around physicality. This interest was also the driving force behind the development of a website project I began with Owen Smith some two years ago.

At first we were bursting with ideas and saw limitless potential. We wanted Criptease to celebrate and provoke, yet be run with social model ideology as the sound and decent underwear which would support the more saucy aspects of the site.

We also knew it had to be "ours", that it had to feel safe; a site where the material was contributed by and for disabled people and in terms we were comfortable with. As for who might view the site, we knew our target was other disabled people, but we were relaxed about anyone looking in, as long as respect was maintained. We are sexy, we are often different and we should not hide ourselves.

But obstacles quickly loomed. Aside from the inevitable problems with initial funding, there were also issues about hosting the site. Who would touch it? When you get past the niceties, crip sex still makes a hell of a lot of "normal" folk uncomfortable, and here we were, attempting to create a place of raw, rude and unashamedly provocative disability erotica.

Initially it was easy to target like-minded friends. Photos, stories and artwork did come in. But not enough. Quite understandably, many possible contributors wanted to see the site first – but not only were we having trouble pinning down an acceptable host, we didn't have enough material in the first place to run it at all. There were fears of exploitation, of contributions being used inappropriately. Was this site to be a mere tacky freakshow porn site?

This issue goes to the nervous heart of sexuality and pornography. It felt like we were plunged into familiar and unsolvable arguments, but with the added entanglement of attempting to grasp the relative shadowland of disability sexuality. And so it floundered, and still waits in the jittery wings of a society seemingly – incredibly – not fully comfortable with disabled people having, wanting and enjoying sex.

Recently, Owen and myself rediscovered our enthusiasm to launch Criptease, but we need fresh input, we need active contributors, and we need a dedicated moderator. With this in mind I would like to invite feedback from *DN* readers.

What I don't doubt for one moment is that we have a right to this space. Criptease should burst onto the internet – for us, by us – to arouse, challenge, share and celebrate all the erotic computations that only we, as disabled people, can offer.

** Penny Pepper is a writer and performer and is currently working on several writing projects for radio, stage and film. Desires (Bejamo Press), her collection of disability erotica, is available to DN readers at the special price of £5, p&p free. Please send cheques, payable to P Pepper, to Desires, Box 304, Rosden House, 372 Old Street, London EC1V 9AU. Or email criptease@hotmail.co.uk for further information, including purchase through PayPal. Please also use this email to post comments and feedback related to this article*

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For a copy of the tender invitation, and more details of the activity sought, please contact Reena Johal at the Cross River Partnership:

- Phone: 020 7926 0082
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